



The WCIC staff distributed toys and other items donated by American citizens to 40 Iraqi kindergarten children in Baghdad. DoA photo by Azhar Jasim

NIAC Programs Target Iraqi Widows, Children

The National Iraqi Assistance Center helps Iraqi citizens get back on their feet.

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INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq, June 10, 2005

— Post-Saddam Iraq has undergone numerous positive changes: establishing a democratic government, improving and establishing sewage systems, and rebuilding much-needed schools are just a few examples. The National Iraqi Assistance Center, located at the Convention Center here, is playing a major part in helping reconstruct Iraq — not with bricks and mortar, but with specialized teams whose goals are to help Iraqi citizens get back on their feet. The Women's and Children's Issues Center is a section of the

economically, it also helps stitch back together other rips created by the former regime. "This program also helps keep their children off the streets because [after losing their fathers], some of them have been out there working to help support their families," said Emery.

"This will help force the children back in school and the mothers to help keep them there."

Besides sewing machines, the WCIC has arranged for other donations to help make life a little easier for Iraqi citizens.

NIAC dedicated to helping the victims who were perhaps affected the most by years of instability: orphans, widows and their children.

“When we donated sewing machines to some women, one lady cried” “She cried because she really appreciated what we are doing,” Azhar Jasim, WCIC Iraqi supervisor.

“One of the biggest concerns at the NIAC is taking care of the widows because throughout the different wars of Iraq, many of the families have lost their fathers,” said Maj. Maria Emery, supervisor and military counterpart for the WCIC. “So to us, that’s a big concern — that they’re not able to support themselves. Although a lot of good things have happened in Iraq, it just still seems this group has been neglected and needs economic help.”

The WCIC was established August 2004 during the 350th Civil Affairs’ rotation, said Emery, who is part of the 353rd CA, the unit that replaced the 350th. Emery said her team comprises herself, her Iraqi counterpart and three additional people. The team is responsible for keeping the nongovernment organizations and the military organizations informed about the needs of the citizens they encounter in order to keep the aid coming and programs going. Ultimately, the programs and the donations through the NGOs are what give the Iraqi women and children what they desperately need.

“We have a variety of programs,” Emery said. “One of them is the sewing machine program, where we try to focus on widows who support their families, or have no other option but to be the main source of support. So we gave them sewing machines so they can work for themselves.”

“When we donated sewing machines to some women, one lady cried,” said Azhar Jasim, WCIC Iraqi supervisor, who is Emery’s counterpart and also the coordinator between national and international NGOs. “[She cried] not because she was sad, but because she was happy — happy that people came to Iraq to give them their freedom and help them get back on their feet at the same time. She cried because she really appreciated what we are doing.”

The sewing machine program not only helps families

“NGOs have donated things such wheelchairs and computers to schools,” Jasim said. “We also donated humanitarian aid to orphanages and for poor families in general. It has made a big difference in their lives.”

Every week, Emery and her team attend two meetings to exchange information with the NGOs, said team member “Tina” (name withheld for security), Iraqi assisting manager. Here, the WCIC staff informs the NGOs on issues like the progress of the programs in place and any outstanding issues the recipients may have. However, tangible benefits are not the only results sought at these meetings.

“We are trying to modify some things in the constitution in regards to women and children,” Tina said. “For example, right now, there are only five women in ministry positions. We are trying to increase the number of women working in the ministries. Also, in the last constitution, there was a clause about divorce. If a man divorces his wife, this clause prevents her from marrying again for a certain period of time. We are trying to remove this clause from the constitution.”

As the old saying goes, “You reap what you sow.” Ultimately, every change made now will affect everyone’s future — for better or worse — especially the children of Iraq.

“The Iraqi children are smart — they understand and see the difference from before,” Tina said. “[My niece] thinks her future will be a good one. She hears about the car bombs and the kidnappings, but she still has hope for the future. She is a happy child.” Mathematically, happy children equal happy future, not just for Iraqi children, but for American children as well.

“We have another program where we try to put Iraqi children in touch with American children,” said Jasim, smiling. “My vision is if these children develop friendships now, 16 years from now, they’ll find they grew up with a friend from a different culture, and it will be a bridge between two countries. These children are future directors, lawyers and government officials. They are the future.”